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The Florida Times-Union

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Wise denounces Delaware audit

The Associated Press

Duval County School Superintendent Joseph Wise spent thousands of dollars on personal purchases while he was a superintendent in Delaware, according to a Delaware audit released Monday.

Wise's use of a Christina school district credit card from July 2003 to November 2005 was inconsistent with district and state policies, the audit said. During that time, Wise charged more than \$75,000. Some of the money was used for meals and gift certificates, but the auditor's report doesn't specify how much may have been spent improperly.

Wise said Monday the allegations against him are political and he is exploring legal action on what he feels are attempts to defame his character.

"Somebody is going to great lengths to do this, and it's not from within that district," he said.

In a letter to Christina School Board President James Durr, Wise said he had always used integrity during his usage of that district's credit card. He also said he left detailed records of his transactions and was troubled by the conclusions drawn by the auditors.

"No one has contacted me or provided data concerning the assertions in the most recent report," Wise said in a statement e-mailed to the Times-Union Monday. "The auditor's assertions are puzzling because all transactions on any SuperCard used in the district were subject to prior local fund audits conducted each year by the state auditor or his designees."

The audit was ordered by Superintendent Lillian Lowery as part of a financial review when she took the job in March. A financial team discovered a \$28 million deficit, forcing the system to cut jobs.

Wise has refunded or reimbursed \$4,023 in personal expenses totaling \$4,286 and the district never deposited a \$209 check, according to state auditor Thomas Wagner's report.

Wise said those personal expenses were all related to his involvement with non-profits, such as The Broad Foundation, and were reimbursed by those same organizations.

Thresa Giles, Wise's chief financial officer in Christina who followed him to the Duval County school system, said Florida laws prevent some of the issues found in the Delaware audit.

Christina suspended all credit cards as soon as the school district's deficit became known last spring, district spokeswoman Wendy Lapham said.

Times-Union writer Tia Mitchell contributed to this report.

This story can be found on Jacksonville.com at http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/032707/met_8882909.shtml.

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